PAKISTAN batter Salman Ali Agha plays a shot during the first ODI against Sri Lanka at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Tuesday.—Tanveer Shahzad/White Star

Ton-up Salman, fiery Haris star as Pakistan edge Sri Lanka in first ODI

By Kashif Abbasi

Scoreboard

PAKISTAN:	S. Samarawickrama c Babar b Haris.....39
Fakhar Zaman st K. Mendis b Hasaranga.....32	C. Asalanka st Rizwan b Nawaz.....32
Saim Ayub lbw b Fernando.....6	J. Liyanage b Naseem.....28
Babar Azam b Hasaranga 29	K.D. Mendis b Faheem.....9
Mohammad Rizwan lbw b Hasaranga.....5	W. Hasaranga c Babar b Naseem.....59
Salman Ali Agha not out.....105	D. Chameera c&b Faheem.....7
Hussain Talat lbw b Theekshana 62	M. Theekshana not out 21
Mohammad Nawaz not out.....36	A. Fernando not out.....0
EXTRAS (B-1, LB-9, NB-1, W-13).....24	**EXTRAS** (B-1, LB-3, NB-1, W-26) 31
TOTAL (for five wickets, 50 overs)..... 299	**TOTAL** (for nine wickets, 50 overs) 293
DID NOT BAT: Faheem Ashraf, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Haris Rauf, Naseem Shah	**FALL OF WICKETS:** 1-85 (Mishara), 2-85 (K. Mendis), 3-90 (Nissanka), 4-147 (Samarawickrama), 5-183 (Asalanka), 6-191 (Liyanage), 7-210 (K.D. Mendis), 8-247 (Chameera), 9-279 (Hasaranga)
FALL OF WICKETS: 1-14 (Saim), 2-68 (Fakhar), 3-76 (Rizwan), 4-95 (Babar), 5-233 (Hussain)	**BOWLING:** Shaheen 10-0-50-0 (6w), Naseem 10-1-55-2 (4w), Haris 10-0-61-4 (4w, 1nb), Faheem 10-0-49-2 (1w), Nawaz 8-0-48-1, Saim 1-0-12-0, Hussain 1-0-14-0 (1w)
BOWLING: Fernando 10-2-42-1 (4w), Chameera 10-1-63-0 (1w), Theekshana 10-0-64-1 (2w, 1nb), Liyanage 8-0-48-0 (5w), Hasaranga 10-0-54-3, Asalanka 2-0-18-0	**RESULT:** Pakistan won by six runs.
SRI LANKA:	**PLAYER-OF-THE-MATCH:** Salman Ali Agha
P. Nissanka c Rizwan b Haris.....29	
K. Mishara c Shaheen b Haris.....38	
K. Mendis b Haris 0	

RAWALPINDI: A counter-punching century by Salman Ali Agha and Haris Rauf fiery pace led Pakistan to a six-run win over Sri Lanka in the first One-day International at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Tuesday night.

While Salman's gritty knock carried Pakistan out of deep trouble for the hosts to post an above-par 299-run total, Haris bowled a red-hot spell (4-61) to push Sri Lanka despite the hosts looking dangerous early on.

Sri Lanka had cruised to 75-0 in the first 10 overs as openers Pathum Nissanka and debutant Kamil Mishara punished the Pakistan pacers' lack of discipline. Both batters were also handed a reprieve each as Salman Ali Agha dropped Nissanka in the slips off Shaheen while he was playing at six. Mishara, meanwhile, escaped a scare when Haris Rauf failed to hold on to a chance in the 10th over.

In between, the Sri Lankan openers hit boundaries on regular intervals with the Pakistan bowlers struggling to maintain consistent line and length in the first powerplay.

But two overs later, Haris Rauf removed both Mishara and the incoming Kusal Mendis in consecutive balls as the former holed the pacer out to mid-on before Kusal played a fiercely quick one onto his stumps as Pakistan bounded back.

Haris then returned to get the better of Nissanka as well, forcing an outside edge for the right-hander to get caught behind off a delivery that seamed away viciously.

Soon after Sri Lanka had crossed the 100-run mark in the 16th over, Pakistan could have strengthened their grip on the match had Fakhar Zaman caught a skier by Charith Asalanka off Faheem Ashraf.

Gradually finding their feet, Sri Lanka were 117-3 by the end of 20 overs as Sadeera Samarawickrama pulled a Naseem Shah bouncer for his third boundary. And by the halfway stage, the visitors had 134-3 on the board, before Samarawickrama and Charith Asalanka brought up their 50-run partnership to anchor Sri Lanka again.

But the stand was broken thanks to a stunning catch by Babar Azam in the slips — the former Pakistan skipper diving towards his right to pluck the ball, which was flying away to give Haris his fourth wicket in the form of Samarawickrama.

Asalanka, however, kept charging, sweeping for two boundaries off spinner Saim Ayub's first over; the 30th of the innings, as Sri Lanka brought down the required run-rate to nearly run-a-ball.

The Sri Lankan captain, however, perished as he looked to go for more — going down the track in an attempt to launch Mohammad Nawaz, only to miss it and get stumped by wicket-keeper Mohammad Rizwan.

Janith Liyanage followed suit, falling prey to Naseem Shah — who had a poor day out with the ball — as the pacer castled the right-hander with an in-swinger as things got bleak for Sri Lanka.

Within two overs after Sri Lanka had crossed 200, Faheem saw Kamindu Mendis play one on to his stumps in the 38th and then caught Dushmantha Chameera off his own bowling in the 45th.

With five overs to go and 10 runs needed per over, Wanindu Hasaranga's presence in the middle with 38 off 39 against his name, danger couldn't be written off completely.

The star Sri Lanka all-rounder took on Faheem for fours over mid-off and past point each to bring up his half century in 45 balls. Hasaranga welcomed Haris back into the attack with a deft touch for another boundary past third man.

Sri Lanka's hopes, however, was finally quashed when Hasaranga holed a full-toss by Naseem out to Babar at long-on before Hussain Talat defended 21 runs in the last over.

Earlier, Hasaranga had seemingly cast a spell around Pakistan's batters but after Salman and Hussain got together, the hosts found a way through it — and with aplomb.

Salman hit a sparkling century and Hussain made a career-best 62 as Pakistan rallied from being 95-4 at one stage to post 299-5.

Sri Lanka were well and truly on top in the first half of Pakistan's innings thanks to a mesmerising spell of leg-spin bowling by Hasaranga (3-54), only for Salman, who made an unbeaten 105, and Hussain to get stuck in and revive their side's hopes with a 138-run partnership before Nawaz applied the finishing touches with a quickfire 36 not out.

After Asalanka won the toss and opted to bowl, Asitha Fernando rewarded his skipper with an early breakthrough when he trapped Saim lbw with a searing yorker.

Saim looked a pale shadow of the man who had thrashed South Africa to all parts just three days ago in Faisalabad and it was a struggle for his opening partner Fakhar and one-drop Babar as well.

Pakistan only got past 50 in the 16th over and Fakhar departed soon after hitting the first six of the innings for a laborious 55-ball 32 when Hasaranga had him stumped. The left-hander also hit two fours.

Hasaranga then had Rizwan lbw before adding to Pakistan's misery when he cleaned up Babar (29) with a googly. Babar's departure, after facing 51 balls and hitting three fours, left Pakistan tottering at 95-4 and it could've been worse when Hasaranga rapped Hussain on the pads, only for the umpire to give it not out and Sri Lanka having burned both their reviews.

Hussain would make most of that reprieve and after Salman took Pakistan's score beyond 100 in the 26th over with a late cut off Hasaranga for his third boundary, the left-hander deposited Maheesh Theekshana to the cover fence.

Salman and Hussain kept rotating the strike and both helped themselves a four each in the 31st over by Asalanka, before the latter brought up 150 for Pakistan when he cut Theekshana away for four in the 34th.

Hussain was growing in confidence with every delivery — a drive down the ground for four off Hasaranga exemplifying that, before he cut Liyanage for another boundary — and when Salman raised his ninth ODI half-century off 52 deliveries, Pakistan were set for the charge as the crowd began filling in once the floodlights were turned on.

Hussain showed that intent when he deposited Hasaranga for a one-bounce four wide of long-on to get to 42, beyond his previous ODI high, and Salman got his fifth four when he got gloves to a delivery going down legside before taking Pakistan past 200 with his sixth midway through the 41st over.

Salman moved into the seventies with a four over cover and Hussain brought up his maiden fifty off 53 balls before celebrating it with a six over Theekshana's head.

Sri Lanka finally broke through when Hussain was out lbw but Salman kept going and took Pakistan to 250 on the first ball of the 46th over. The right-hander then got successive boundaries off Dusmantha Chameera before completing his second ODI ton off just 83 balls with a single.

Nawaz provided an able hand from the other end, getting two boundaries as 20 runs came off the 48th over. Fernando was then deposited by the left-hander for six over long-off and Nawaz would get two fours in the last over as Pakistan set Sri Lanka a target of exactly 300.

England's style will suit fast Australian pitches: Trescothick

PERTH: England's batters will relish the pace and bounce of Australian wickets during the Ashes series as they will allow Ben Stokes' side to play with their trademark aggression and put home bowlers under pressure, assistant coach Marcus Trescothick said.

Lively Australian tracks are expected to test England's high-tempo "Bazball" style, introduced by head coach Brendon McCullum, but Trescothick said on Tuesday the tourists are confident they can thrive in those conditions.

"The style of cricket we play is to try and put the bowlers under pressure," Trescothick told reporters in Perth, where his team are preparing for the November 21 series opener.

"Playing on bouncy pitches, where the ball comes onto the bat nicely, is something we always talk about trying to get back at home. It suits our style of play, which we're happy with.

"Definitely, the pitches have generally evolved in the last few years in Australia but you still expect them to be quick and bouncy and maybe have a bit more in it for the bowlers compared to years gone by."

Australia have won the last two home series 4-0 and whitewashed England 5-0 in 2013-14.

Trescothick, who played in three Ashes campaigns including a triumphant 2005 series on home soil, said England's batters were also looking to be smarter on the pitch.

"We're always trying to evolve," the 49-year-old added. "Certain things have helped us along the way but as a mantra we're always trying to remain positive and put oppositions under pressure, whether we're bowling or batting."

Joe Root will head into the five-match series seeking a first century Down Under and Trescothick backed the top-ranked test batter to break his duck.

"The way he's gone in the last couple of years will probably explain that he's comfortable with what he's trying to do at the moment and how he's playing his game," Trescothick said.—Reuters

Botham concerned over England's Ashes preparations

MELBOURNE: Former England captain Ian Botham has raised questions about the team's lean Ashes preparations and whether the players will be ready to take on an entire nation backing Australia's bid to retain the urn.

England did not have their full squad in Perth until last Sunday and will play one internal match before the series-opener starts in the Western Australian capital on November 21.

All but one of Australia's Ashes squad, meanwhile, are warming up with the red ball in domestic Sheffield Shield matches around the country.

A number of England's players played white-ball cricket in neighbouring New Zealand before arriving but Botham said touring teams traditionally needed time to adjust to Australian conditions.

"It's not the way I would prepare," Botham told reporters in Melbourne on Tuesday. "I think historically you have to acclimatise when you come down here. You've got to remember there's 24 million people down here, not 11. And you have to take that on board.

"The ball does seems to get to you quicker [in Perth] and the light's different. You've got the 'Fremantle Doctor'; there's all kinds of things go into the melting pot."

Joe Root-captained England played two internal matches against the England Lions before the last 2021/22 Ashes in Australia and lost the series 4-0.

Botham expects a better outcome for Ben Stokes's team this time around, as long as they can avoid too many injuries.

"It's one of those big ifs," the 69-year-old said. "If England's bowlers can stay fit, which doesn't happen very often, and the captain can play a full part then I think England have a got a real chance."

Botham said England could consider unleashing a four-prong pace attack against Australia, saying West Indies had done pretty well with a similar strategy in 2024 and split a two-Test series 1-1 with Pat Cummins's team.

"I think it's the right way. You want to be aggressive, come through and players, if they're not playing very well, don't like it in the ribs," he said. "So, yeah, it'll be interesting."

Botham was speaking at a press conference looking ahead to the 150th anniversary Test between Australia and England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) from March 11-15, 2027.

Governing body Cricket Australia is launching a ticket ballot on December 23 for the non-Ashes match, which commemorates the nations' first test in 1877 at the MCG.

Australia beat England by 45 runs in the centenary match in 1977 at the stadium, with pace bowler Denis Lillee taking 11 wickets for the hosts and England number three Derek Randall named man of the match after scoring a second-innings 174.

Greg Chappell, who captained Australia in the centenary Test, remembered having to "represent" England in back-yard matches against brother Ian, who played as Australia.

"It's hard to beat 150 years of history," Chappell said alongside Botham. "Sadly, we've been alive for half of it."—Reuters

Starc wants spicy Ashes wickets, not five-day Tests

MELBOURNE: Australia paceman Mitchell Starc has urged curators to prepare bowler-friendly pitches for the Ashes, warning against flattening surfaces to maximise five-day revenue as England's aggressive "Bazball" approach looms.

Australia defeated India 3-1 in the last home summer on pitches that offered encouragement for batters and bowlers alike, and Starc said he hoped that would continue in the five-Test series against England.

"I hope the groundsmen stick to their guns and prepare the wickets they want," Starc told Australian media. "If we are worried about five days of revenue then there's bigger problems at hand."

Left-armer Starc took a four-wicket haul for New South Wales on a tepid Sydney Cricket Ground pitch on Monday in the Sheffield Shield match against Victoria.

Though encouraged by his bowling in his first first-class match since July, Starc said the wicket would have played right into the England batters' hands.

"Yeah no doubt. Especially if they're pretty docile wickets like this," he said. "We know the way they're trying to play their cricket. We'll worry about that next week."

Starc, who recently quit T20I cricket to extend his career in Tests, said his bowling rhythm was back after a long layoff from red-ball cricket and he was building nicely for the Ashes series-opener in Perth starting on November 21.

"I think the break was a good thing, but I just tend to be someone who continuous bowling keeps in rhythm," said the 35-year-old. "Ive just been speaking to [head coach] Ronnie [Andrew McDonald] then, I think Ive sorted it out and now its just getting the engine going again."—Reuters

Alcaraz fights back to beat Fritz at ATP Finals

TURIN: Carlos Alcaraz battled to victory over Taylor Fritz at the ATP Finals on Tuesday, moving to within one win of securing the year-end number one ranking for the second time.

The five-time Grand Slam champion made it two wins from two in the Jimmy Connors Group with a comeback 6-7 (2/7), 7-5, 6-3 victory over last year's runner-up Fritz in Turin.

"I'm really happy that I was able to come back, find my good tennis," Alcaraz said. "I just tried to make the most of the opportunities that he gave to me. I think we played great tennis, some great points."

Alcaraz, who was replaced by rival Jannik Sinner of Italy as world number one following the Paris Masters earlier this month, will finish 2025 at the top of the rankings if he beats Musetti on Thursday.

Alcaraz now holds a 5-1 winning record against Fritz, whose only win against the Spaniard came at the Laver Cup in September.

Fritz of the US will face De Minaur in his last group contest.

Fritz swept aside Musetti in his opener on Monday with a dominant serving display.

Alcaraz immediately showed he would put up stronger resistance on return, but Fritz managed to hold in a lengthy first game, hitting three aces and saving two break points.

The Spaniard also had to dig deep to level at 1-1, staving off three break points himself.

He appeared to have made the most of that mistake as Fritz was broken for the first time in the tournament, but Alcaraz could not consolidate the break and dropped serve too.

Both players' serves continued to be tested, with Alcaraz seeing off two more break points in the eighth game as the first set eventually went to a tie-break.

But Fritz powered through the breaker, sealing a one-set lead after 70 minutes with his sixth ace.

Some brutal hitting with his forehand brought up the first break point of the second set for Fritz in the fifth game, but Alcaraz came out on top in a dramatic rally to save it.

Alcaraz saw off a second break point with an ace and finally got out of the draining, 21-minute service game when Fritz fired long, celebrating as if he had won the match.

Fritz fought through a difficult game himself to make it 4-all after Alcaraz netted a return on break point, as the second set edged towards another tie-break.

But the American buckled under the pressure in the 12th game, as two wild unforced errors helped bring up three set points for Alcaraz.

The 22-year-old took the second opportunity, with a rasping passing shot forcing a deciding set.

Fritz managed to stay on serve early in the third set, but the momentum of the match had shifted and Alcaraz grabbed the crucial break in the sixth game.

Sixth seed Fritz showed great resolve to save three match points in game eight, but Alcaraz successfully served it out to love, sealing the win as Fritz blasted a backhand wide.

Late on Monday, Sinner began his bid to retain the ATP Finals title with a resounding 7-5, 6-1 win over injury-hit Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime in their round-robin clash.

The pair were meeting for the fourth time since August, and eight days after their last clash, with the outcome the same as Sinner eased into the match before overpowering Auger-Aliassime, who needed medical attention during the second set.Sinner extended his incredible indoor hardcourt winning streak to 27 matches, his last defeat on the surface coming against Novak Djokovic in the 2023 ATP Finals decider.—AFP

SPAIN'S Carlos Alcaraz hits a return against Taylor Fritz of the US during their ATP Finals match at Palasport Olimpico on Tuesday.—Reuters